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## RELIGIOUS LIFE AT HARVARD

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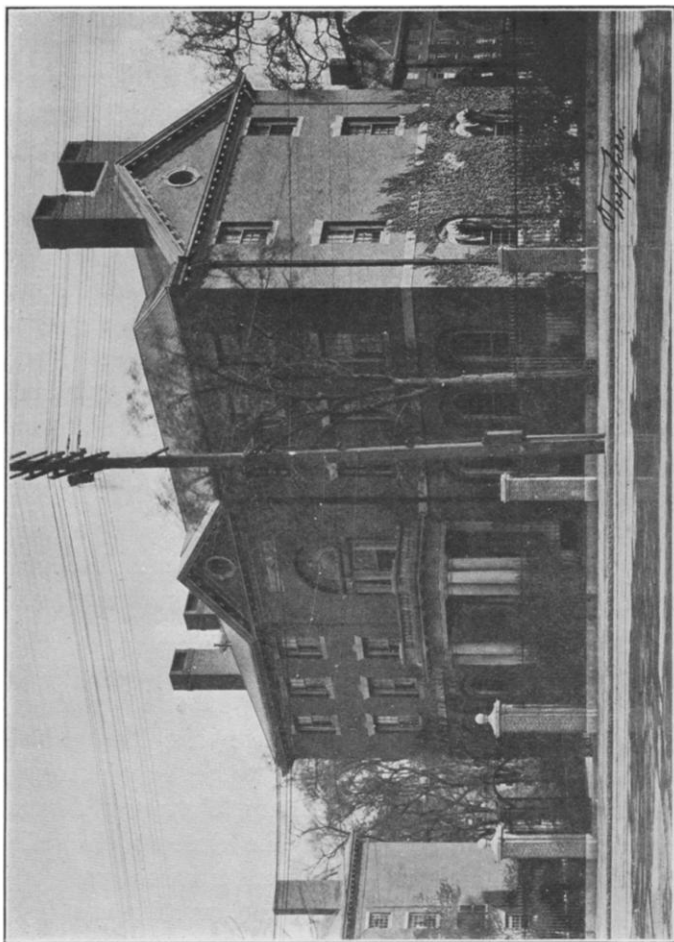
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Anyone asked to describe the religious situation at a great university is likely to undertake the task with some trepidation. The ethical idealism of the American college is clearly apparent. There are few places where it is so easy to do right and so hard to do wrong as in undergraduate communities. There are few places where the voluntary religious expression, while meager, is more frank and genuine. One recalls that when Henry Drummond had spent some two weeks at Cambridge, had then made a tour of the western colleges and had come back to Harvard, he said to Professor Peabody, at that time chairman of the Harvard Board of Preachers, "Your morning chapel is the best of all; it is the most religious service I have ever attended." But while it is clear to the sympathetic and discerning observer that there is a deep and genuine religious spirit in Harvard University, as in most of our schools and colleges, it is by no means easy to measure and analyze it. Young men here as elsewhere are unconventional in their religious expression and more apt to disguise than to display their deeper convictions. There is a story current in Cambridge of an undergraduate who died some years ago at the close of his Freshman year and whose diary certain of the officers of the university were permitted to see. In this book the lad had written, after he had been but a few weeks in residence, "I fear that this is a very irreligious place." Later on in the year, after the boy had become adjusted to his surroundings, he wrote in the same diary, "I cannot understand what I meant by calling the college irreligious; it is the most religious place I ever got into." Now we, like this boy, do not find the religious life of the University either obvious or commonplace in its expression, while we recognize its sincerity and depth.

And in order to understand it at all, we must remember both the typical attitude of the undergraduate in general and the peculiar influence which Harvard brings to bear upon that attitude. Up to the time when the Freshman enters college his experience of the world, if it has been a normal and wholesome one, has been largely mediated. Life has been made for him by his parents or guardians or friends. It is known chiefly through its accepted and accredited expressions. Then the boy comes to Cambridge. He lives in a wide-open dormitory on Mount Auburn Street or in the Yard. He is set quite free from the restraints and the traditions of a provincial and domestic life. His chapel attendances are not compulsory. His courses, within certain limits, are not dictated. His comings and goings are not watched. Where and how he will he touches life for himself, with his own right hand. His is no longer a mediated experience. His second-hand faith, his inherited convictions, his imposed principles, drop away, like the shreds of an old garment from his naked passion for reality. That passion is the characteristic one of the normal undergraduate here. He has a fine contempt for forms, a superb disdain of conventions. He is set on that quest which is the most necessary and the most perilous search the world has knowledge of—the quest of half-awakened youth for its own realities.

Now, moulding and directing these eager lads as they struggle to find themselves and their own world, is the peculiar spirit of this place. For more than two centuries Harvard was the stronghold of Puritanism, the home of deliberate introspection, self-examination, moral self-consciousness, the place where character seemed of infinitely more importance than a superficial and facile piety. Every tradition of the college says to the undergraduate, "Search thyself! Be modest. Examine motives. Above all, be honest. Know exactly what you mean and say that and that only. Let your deeds and not your lips speak. Remember that faith without works is dead."

What then is the result? Why, this—that the first and universal characteristic of the Harvard undergraduate is a dread of seeming to appear better than he is. He often appears worse than he is, lest you should think him to be what he is not. In common with



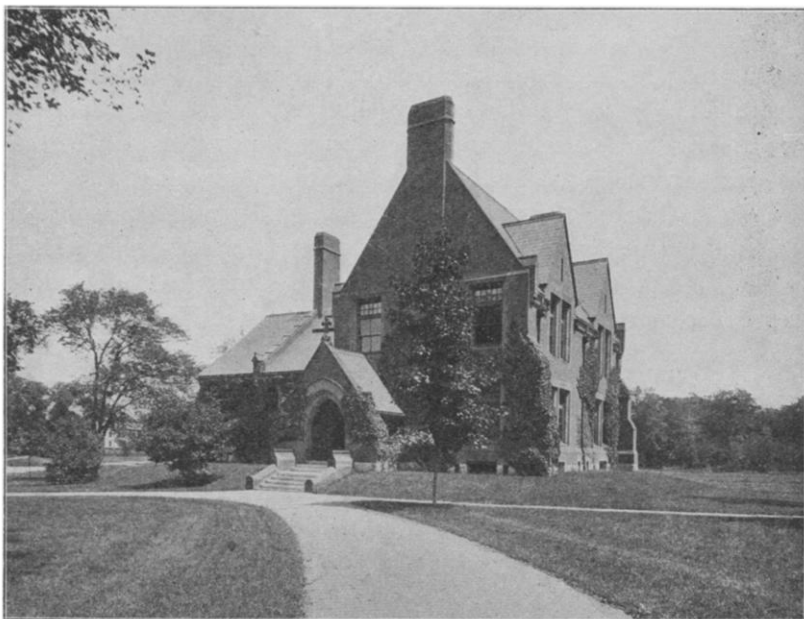
PHILLIPS BROOKS HOUSE

most collegians, but perhaps in an intensified form, hatred of sham and love of honesty are at the bottom of his character. And his second characteristic, born of his Puritan environment and inheritance, is a deep-seated reticence concerning the things of the spirit. He believes, but he cannot talk about his belief. He will live the life, but he does not like to bear witness to it. Prayer meetings repel him as much as unselfish Christian service attracts him. But whatever outward expression of his religious life he does make is made with singular persistency and dignity.

Take for instance Morning Prayers, held daily at a quarter to nine in Appleton Chapel. While there are about five thousand students in Harvard University, most of the graduate schools are removed from the Yard and the number of men in the whole University who by virtue of location could be justly expected to support the services in Appleton Chapel is only about fifteen hundred. Yet the average attendance of students at daily chapel is one hundred, and at the Sunday morning service the average attendance last year was 513, of which almost precisely half were students of the University. It would be hard to find outside this company of youth any ordinary community of men and women numbering fifteen hundred souls who would support a daily service with an average attendance of 100. And such support as would be given to such a service would be made up largely of women. It is always to be remembered that one hundred men in chapel every morning means at least three hundred men whose attendance is regular although not daily. Here then in the chapel service, which has been a voluntary service now for more than a quarter of a century, Harvard undergraduates bear a quiet, restrained, but very genuine witness to their allegiance to the things of the spirit. This year there has grown out of a voluntary Freshman Bible class, which met for the first three months of the college year each Monday night, with an average attendance of seventy-seven men, the request for a Freshman service in Appleton Chapel which shall be addressed by the chairman of the Board of Preachers and by the president of the University and in which the opportunities and obligations of the chapel attendance shall be set before the class as a whole. In how many colleges would the Freshmen vote themselves into an added religious

service in order to have the persuasions and sanctions of a daily public worship set forth to them?

But as would be expected in a great community of modest, somewhat self-conscious, reticent youth, whose chief emphasis is upon conduct and character rather than upon testimony and worship, the religious spirit chiefly manifests itself here in the multiform undergraduate activities of Phillips Brooks House. This



HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

is a noble colonial building, dedicated in 1900 as a memorial to the former bishop of Massachusetts. Here are the headquarters of various student religious organizations, the Christian Association, the St. Paul Society for the Episcopalians, the Catholic Club, and the Harvard Mission. All these societies are united in one general association, under a graduate secretary and his assistants who serve all the constituent parts. Phillips Brooks House itself is under the advice and control of two committees, one appointed by the

Harvard Corporation, and the other an Advisory Committee composed of students. The amount of social service undertaken by Harvard undergraduates and financed by them under the guidance of this undergraduate religious society, is truly impressive. Here voluntary Bible-study groups in all the classes are organized, some led by officers of the University and some by upper classmen. Here the Freshmen reception is held and Information Bureaus established for the benefit of new men, and here, last year, some three hundred undergraduates voluntarily engaged throughout the year in stated and routine forms of social service in various Boston and Cambridge Settlements, missions, and churches. There is no single activity in the University—literary, social, or athletic—which attracts to itself so many undergraduates each year as this of social service in the Phillips Brooks House Association.

What, then, shall we say of religion at Harvard University? This: that it is far more real than apparent; that it manifests itself in life, but not overmuch in speech. It shows in the splendid record for sportsmanship, the scrupulous honor of Harvard men on the athletic field, and in the universal absence of cheating and deceiving in the classroom. It shows itself in the wide human interests to which the average undergraduate gives much of his time and effort and substance. It shows itself in the singular and impressive devoutness of the University religious services. And it may finally be added, it also shows itself in the increasing interest of the University as a whole in the claims and opportunities of the Christian ministry and in historic Christianity as a redemptive faith, which centers, not so much in the teaching as in the person and work of Jesus Christ